**Inquiry into Our Past Writing Practices**

*Eng. W400, Prof. Fox, IUPUI. adapted from an assignment by Prof. Linda Miller-Cleary, University of Minnesota Duluth*

Your history with writing will affect how you teach writing. Whether you enjoyed your writing experiences, disliked them intensely, or were indifferent, you have internalized those experiences, and if you aren’t careful, they will influence your teaching in ways you may not be aware of. This assignment, requiring in-depth interviewing, will help you remember writing experiences and reflect on how they affect your beliefs about teaching writing. Together we can reflect on all our experiences, discovering patterns and issues that can help us be more thoughtful teachers and writers.

**Part One- Interviewing Inquiry with your interviewing partner**

In these interviews, ask open-ended questions such as those below and use follow-up questions when you (1) want to know more, (2) have questions, or (3) sense that there is more to be said. I encourage those being interviewed to tell stories whenever possible in response to questions because stories, by their nature, already contain a sense of meaning.

The first interview asks you to reconstruct your histories with writing. The second asks you to explore your current experience with writing. The third asks you to reflect again on your reconstructed past and present writing experience and to make meaning of it in its relation to your future teaching of writing. *Note: If it is difficult for you and your partner to arrange three separate interviews, you can combine Interviews 1 and 2, or 2 and 3, but allow sufficient time to do this well. You might also build a break into such a combined interview so that both of you can switch gears.*

Following are some suggested questions. Feel free to generate more, and to let the interview develop its own direction. The interviewer should take careful notes, trying to capture the interviewee’s exact words and phrasing as much as possible. If you want to record the interview, you can, but transcribing recordings takes a lot of time. So rely primarily on your notes even if you make a recording.

**Interview I**: What has writing been like for you from the time you first remember until the present? What do you remember of writing before you began school? in elementary school? junior high school/middle school? high school? college? Who helped you with writing and what was that like? What kind of writing did you see your parents/ siblings/ other family members doing? Tell me about a time(s) when writing was really good /bad for you? Can you recreate that experience for me? You haven't said much about that \_\_\_\_\_ (some aspect of the interviewee’s experience).

**Interview II**: What is writing like for you right now? Can you tell me stories about the kinds of writing that you do in and outside of school? How does writing fit into a typical day? How do you go about a writing project from the beginning until you feel it is finished? What is the process like for you? When is it exciting or hard? What do you worry about? How do other people help or hinder the process? If I had a picture of you at home writing, what would it look like? Where do you write, when, how, with what? If you are teaching writing, what is that like for you? What do you like/dislike about it?

**Interview III**: Now that you have described what writing was like for you in the past and present, what meaning do you make of your experience with writing? What sense do you make of it? (Asking this question in several different ways helps.) What things are important to you in your life? How does writing or the teaching of writing connect with things that are important? How has the past experience made current experience good/ bad/ exciting/ distressing/ frustrating? How do you understand that? What is there that seems important to you that we haven't covered? Are you realizing anything through these interviews that might shape your way of being (or not being) with future students?

*Post Interview III dialogue*. When you are both done with Interview III, discuss the intersections and contrasts in your experience.

**Part II- Profile**

Read over the notes on your three interviews, and construct a profile of your partner as a writer and learner of writing. This profile should probably be 3-4 pages, but I’m not too concerned with length. The primary purpose of this profile is to convey your partner’s experiences with writing and learning to write, and how your partner makes meaning of those experiences today, as a person preparing to teach writing. Be as true to what your partner said as you can be, using his/her own words frequently. Do not impose your own interpretation on your partner’s experience. Report on how he or she interprets that experience. Your own interpretation can be part of your conversation with your partner and can come into Part III, as well as your reflections in your multi-genre project. You should allow time for your partner to read over a draft of the profile and provide feedback and suggestions. When your partner and I “sign off” on the profile, you will share it with the rest of the class, both reading it aloud and posting it online.

**Part III- Inquiry into the Experience of Writing and Teaching Writing As Experienced by the Class**

When you share your profiles with each other, I will ask you to listen not only as colleagues, but also as researchers, looking for common themes that arise from your collective writing experiences. All the profiles considered together will give us data to analyze. I will ask you to take notes about what you are hearing during the profile reading. As a class, we will generate a document that captures the common themes and issues we notice in all this data.